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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 001716

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STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: ASEC CASC PGOV PHUM PREL PTER RP  
SUBJECT: MELISSA ROXAS CASE UPDATE

REF: A. MANILA 1397  
1B. MANILA 1363  
1C. MANILA 1219  
1D. MANILA 1113

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Melissa Roxas, the 31-year-old Filipino-American community activist who alleges she was abducted and tortured in May by individuals she believed to be Philippine security forces, returned to the Philippines July 21. She has since offered testimony to the Philippine Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Philippine House of Representatives' Committee on Human Rights, and an Appeals Court, repeating her earlier account of events in May. A right-wing Philippine politician on July 25 provided a video and photos purportedly showing Roxas training with communist New People's Army (NPA) fighters in a remote terrorist camp, although she denies having been involved in NPA training or attacks. Ms. Roxas has so far rebuffed all attempts by the Mission and the FBI to offer assistance. Ambassador and other Mission staff have underscored to Philippine interlocutors at all levels the seriousness with which we view the security of Americans present in the Philippines.  
END SUMMARY.

Background

12. (C) Ms. Roxas claims that, while working as a community healthcare activist with the leftist Bagong Alyansang Makabayan ("Bayan") organization in Tarlac Province, she and two male Filipino companions were abducted May 19 by armed and hooded assailants, and tortured during six days of confinement. After Roxas resurfaced in Manila on May 25, the Embassy's American Citizens Services Section, Regional Security Officer, and Legal Attaché all attempted to make contact by telephone in order to offer assistance, but persons who identified themselves as Roxas family members declined to facilitate her communication with Mission officers. Roxas's two male companions, Juanito Carabeo and John Edward Handoc, have apparently since gone into hiding; one or both are reportedly active NPA members facing charges for past terrorist acts. After Ms. Roxas departed the Philippines and returned to the United States in early June, she spoke by phone with the FBI's Los Angeles field office, but declined FBI requests to interview her about her experiences. On numerous occasions since, including a July 1 meeting with Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo (reftel A), the Ambassador has emphasized that we take the safety and security of Americans very seriously, and would welcome any new information that may become available in the case.

Roxas Returns to Philippines

¶3. (C) Ms. Roxas returned to the Philippines July 21, conditioning her stay on the provision of protection by the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), rather than Philippine police. She recounted her May experiences at a July 23 CHR hearing. CHR Chair Leila de Lima afterwards indicated that Roxas's description of sounds and other features at the location where she was held might be consistent with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija Province. On July 29, Roxas testified before the Philippine House of Representatives' Committee on Human Rights. An affidavit Roxas had originally submitted to the Philippine Supreme Court on June 3 was referred to the Court of Appeals, where she appeared July 30 to reaffirm the affidavit's contents.

Allegations of NPA Involvement

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¶4. (C) In a July 25 press conference in Quezon City, Philippine Rep. Jovito Palparan, a former Philippine Army general who led a sharp crackdown against communist rebels in the central Philippines, charged that Roxas was a member of the communist New People's Army (NPA), which is designated as a terrorist organization by both the U.S. and EU. Palparan stated that under the nom de guerre "Ka Aya," Roxas trained with NPA guerrillas in remote Aurora Province, on Luzon's sparsely-populated northeast coast. Palparan backed his accusations with photos and a video showing a woman who resembled Roxas undergoing military firearms training exercises in a jungle encampment. Palparan and others have also called on Ms. Roxas's two male Filipino companions to come forward and corroborate her account. While the AFP has

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denied any involvement in Roxas's alleged abduction and torture and promised full cooperation in the investigation, an AFP spokesperson stated July 28 that they are also examining evidence of whether Roxas could be held criminally liable for participation in NPA terrorist attacks in Aurora and Quezon provinces since 2006.

Comment

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¶5. (C) Rep. Palparan's assertions of Roxas's involvement with the NPA hit a special nerve in some government circles and among the public, inasmuch as the group is widely viewed as the nation's most serious insurgent threat. Although forty years after its founding as the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the NPA's numbers are down from its 1980s peak of some 25,000 fighters to approximately 5,000, it remains active in disrupting public security and destroying commercial infrastructure. NPA ambushes and military encounters claim the lives of approximately 150 police officers and soldiers per year; another 50 or more security personnel, government officials, and civilians identified by the NPA as "informants" are killed via carefully premeditated assassinations. Attacks against commercial interests involving communications and transportation infrastructure also result in occasional deaths, as well as significant economic losses (reftel C). Whether or not Palparan's allegations of Roxas's NPA ties turn out to be true, the Mission has continued to echo CHR statements that Ms. Roxas's political affiliations are irrelevant to a full investigation of her alleged kidnapping and torture. As the truth of Ms. Roxas's experiences continues to unfold, the Mission will remain closely apprised of developments in the case and report significant developments to Washington.

KENNEY